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# Rebuilding Global Airpower

By BARRY R. McCaffrey

**A**merican defense strategy is unbalanced, incoherent, underfunded, and not focused on next-generation deterrence and warfighting missions. Moreover, it is distorted by the monthly drain of 10 billion dollars' worth of U.S. defense modernization funding and manpower resources into the ground combat meat-grinder of the civil war in Iraq.

The looming challenge to U.S. national security and foreign policy sovereignty issues in the coming 15 years will be posed by the legitimate and certain emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a global economic and political power with the military muscle to challenge and neutralize the deterrent capacity of the U.S. Navy and Air Force in the broad reaches of the Pacific maritime frontier. In less than one generation, China will have the military capacity to pose a national survival threat to America and to challenge its ability to project power along the Pacific littoral.

To counter this threat, the U.S. national security strategy should be based primarily on unrelenting and transparent diplomacy,

multilevel and balanced economic engagement, strong international multination arms control, and mutual cooperation engagement. New treaties and political relationships with other Pacific Rim partners must bring in the Chinese. Most importantly, American diplomacy must organize extensive and heavily funded people-to-people programs with tourism, military exchanges, student scholarships, partner city programs, and unrestricted mutual media access and transparency. In sum, we will need large doses of wisdom and tolerance by senior U.S. and Chinese political elites.

However, there is little likelihood of U.S. smart engagement power having adequate deterrence impact on Chinese unilateral military capabilities unless we maintain the enormous technological lead to command the air and sea operational maneuver areas surrounding our regional allies—Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia—as well as the Alaskan sea frontier. The PRC clearly is not the only military presence that we must consider. By 2020, we will face resurgent and expanding Russian Federation military power projection capacity

as well as the likely emergence of other major maritime and air nuclear powers, such as India, Iran, Pakistan, and Japan.

The U.S. Air Force is badly underfunded, its manpower is being drastically cut and diverted to support counterinsurgency operations, its modernization program of paradigm shifting technology is anemic, and its aging strike, lift, and tanker fleets are being ground down by nonstop global operations with inadequate air fleet and maintenance capabilities.

The debate over the war in Iraq may soon be replaced by a greatly diminished defense budget as an exhausted joint force winds down our combat presence in the coming 36 months. We may swing from Donald Rumsfeld's focus on the magic of technology as the sole determinant of national security to an equally disastrous concentration on building a ground combat force that could have won Iraq from the start.

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**General Barry R. McCaffrey, USA (Ret.), is Adjunct Professor of International Relations at the United States Military Academy.**

Aircraft participating in firepower demonstration arrayed at Nevada Test and Training Ranges

U.S. Air Force (Kevin J. Gruenwald)

As a central proposition, we should create a U.S. national security policy based principally on the deterrence capabilities of a dominant, global air and naval presence that can:

- guarantee the defense of the continental United States
- provide high levels of assurance for the security of key allies from air, missile, space, cyber, or sea attack
- use conventional weapons to deliver an air, sea, or cyber strike capable of devastating the offensive power of a foreign state.

We must be able to hold at risk the vital national leadership and economic targets of a potential adversary. (This is not an argument to underfund or undervalue a powerful, high-intensity ground warfare capability or a fully modernized and global-reach special operations force capability.)

The resources to create such airpower capabilities are not available in the current (historically weak) wartime defense funding environment of 4 percent of gross national product. Understandably, our current national security priorities are to sustain U.S. forces engaged in a bitter ground struggle that has generated 34,000 U.S. casualties and cost \$400 billion.

The U.S. Air Force is our primary national strategic force. Yet it is too small, is aging, has been marginalized in the current strategic debate, and has mortgaged its modernization program to divert funds to prosecute wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that are inadequately supported by Congress.

The next administration must fix the manpower, aircraft, and funding shortfalls of the Air Force, or we will place the American people in enormous peril.

### Seven Imperatives

*F-22A Raptor.* There is no single greater priority in the coming 10 years than for the Air Force to fund, deploy, and maintain at least 350 F-22A Raptor aircraft to ensure air-to-air total dominance of battlefield airspace in future contested areas. The Air Force has been obliged to trade away its modernization budget because the aircraft has minimal value in low-intensity ground-air combat operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan. (The current 91 aircraft are simply inadequate for anything but special missions.)

This combat aircraft is sheer magic; it cannot be matched by anything the world can produce in the next 25 years. It is vital that we never let this technology be eligible for any foreign military sales.

The F-22A provides a national strategic stealth technology to conduct undetected long-range penetration, at altitudes greater than 15 kilometers, into any nation's airspace, at Mach 2+ high speed. It can destroy key targets and then egress with minimal threat from any possible air-to-air or air-defense system. It

cannot be defeated in air combat by any known current or estimated future enemy aircraft (thrust vector technology).

*C-17 Globemaster III.* We must create the strategic airlift and air-to-air refuel capability (at least 600 C-17 aircraft) to project national military and humanitarian power in the global environment. We currently have an inadequate force of only 150 aircraft supported by an aging refueling fleet. The C-5 aircraft must be retired; these planes are shot. The Army must back off the dubious proposition that it will size its ground combat force around the volume and lift metrics of the C-130 and instead use the C-17 as the sizing template.

The Rumsfeld doctrine postulated bringing home deployed Army and Air Force capabilities from Europe, Okinawa, and Korea. This seismic strategic shift was unexamined and not debated by Congress or the American people. We are bringing home ground- and airstrike assets thousands of miles from basing infrastructure paid for by allies to unprepared U.S.-launch platforms. If we are to pose a serious deterrent capability in the world arena, then we must credibly be able to project power back into future combat areas to sustain allies at risk.

The C-17 represents the capacity to carry out this strategic power projection mission as well to provide intratheater logistics and human-

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F-22A Raptors on flightline during operational readiness exercise



U.S. Air Force (Austin Knox)

itarian lift for pinpoint distribution of thousands of truckload equivalents of supplies per day. The C-17 is a global national transportation asset, not merely a military or Air Force system.

*Air Force Global Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, and Strike Capability.* Primary control of these assets should be exercised by centralized joint air component command and control.

We have already made a 100-year warfighting leap-ahead with the MQ-1 Predator, MQ-9 Reaper, and Global Hawk. Now we have loiter times in excess of 24 hours, persistent eyes-on-target, micro-kill with Hellfire and 500-pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions, synthetic aperture radar, and a host of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) sensors and communications potential that have fundamentally changed the nature of warfare.

We are confusing joint battlespace doctrine. Air component commanders should coordinate all unmanned aerial vehicles based on combatant commander situational warfighting directives.

*Air Force Space Primacy Capabilities.* Our global communications, ISR, and missile defense capabilities cannot operate without secure, robust, and modernized space platforms. We will revert to World War II-era capabilities if we suddenly lose our space advantage. Space is an underresourced and inadequately defended vital U.S. technical capability.

*Air Force Defensive and Offensive Cyber Warfare Capabilities.* We must exponentially expand the resources, research and development, and human talent devoted to the massive and ongoing war against the U.S. communications-computers-control systems; cyber attack is the “poor man’s” weapon of mass destruction. Every classified brief I receive underscores the absolute certainty that all our potential adversaries, terrorist organizations, and many private criminal groups conduct daily electronic reconnaissance and probes of the electromagnetic spectrum and devices fundamental to our national security strategy. We lead the world in technical creativity in these associated engineering and scientific areas. This calls for a serious joint combatant command status with a heavy Air Force lead.

We must sort out the international legal and policy considerations upon which we will base widely understood joint directives governing the centralized employment of offensive cyber warfare. This is the first sword to be unsheathed in time of modern combat.

*Next-generation Long-range Bomber.* We need a follow-on long-range system to the B-2 Spirit Bomber. The B-52 needs to be retired within the decade. The B-2 is inadequate and too vulnerable as a long-range strike platform. At over \$1 billion a copy—with only 21 combat aircraft—the B-2 is too difficult and too outmoded a technology to again start up a production line.

Our offensive capability should include not only long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles with conventional capabilities and sea-launched missiles but also a fully modernized stealth heavy strike bomber with global range.

*Ballistic Missile Defense.* It is extremely gratifying to see the enormous scientific and engineering successes of the ongoing deployment of a layered national ballistic missile defense (BMD). I have been to Fort Greely, Alaska, and verified the genuine shoot-down capability that we now have for midcourse and terminal engagement. The Air Force airborne laser is just short of operational deployment. The Navy Aegis systems now have valid intercept and radar integration into the defensive concept. The system needs substantial ongoing research and development investment and continued operational incremental upgrades in the coming 15 years.

Ballistic missile defense will be a central aspect of any successful arms control strategy to convince North Korea, Iran, and other rogue states to eventually back off the proliferation of missile-delivered nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding the continued debate among national security experts, it is my firm judgment that there is no higher defensive responsibility for

the Armed Forces than the deployment and continued upgrade of a coherent, global, treaty-based BMD system.

During four combat tours and 32 years of Active military service, I learned to count on the professionalism, courage, and support of the most technically sophisticated Air Force in the world. Air Force fighter-bombers and AC-47s kept my Vietnam 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division rifle company alive under intense combat conditions. Air Force forward air controllers were instrumental to both my company and battalion surviving desperate engagements. I have been evacuated to Air Force hospitals and twice flown to safety by Air Force medical flights. My combat 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Operation *Desert Storm* was supported with Air Force–delivered logistics and with responsive and crucial intelligence assets. As a geographic combatant commander, I have had Air Force security and medical units organize and sustain detainee and refugee operations. I have parachuted from types of Air Force transports too numerous to list.

This is the most effective, dedicated, and well-trained Air Force we have ever put into combat. Its courage and leadership are simply awesome.

We have underresourced this proud and crucial fighting force. We lack the equipment, Airmen, and money to adequately defend America in the coming 15 years. We are placing our national security at enormous risk if we do not act soon to correct these crucial shortfalls. **JFQ**

Air Force Secretary Wynne and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Moseley at House Armed Services Committee hearing



U.S. Air Force (Jim Vanhegy)